

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL:               SJR 2300

SPONSOR:        Senator Haridopolos

SUBJECT:         Homestead Property / Assessments

DATE:            March 18, 2004         REVISED:       \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Cooper	Yeatman	CP	Unfavorable
2.	_____	_____	FT	_____
3.	_____	_____	AGG	_____
4.	_____	_____	AP	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**I. Summary:**

SJR 2300 proposes to amend Art. VII, s. 4, of the Florida Constitution, to provide for assessing at less than just value property purchased within 1 year after a sale of homestead property and established as new homestead property, with certain limitations. This would allow for “portability” of the “Save Our Homes” assessment limitation.

This joint resolution creates, upon approval of the electorate, subsection 4(c)(8) of Article VII of the State Constitution.

**II. Present Situation:**

*Property Taxation in Florida*

Ad valorem tax or “property tax” continues to be a major source of revenue for local governments in Florida. In FY 2000-01 (the last year for which fiscal information is available) property taxes constituted 39 percent of county governmental revenue (\$5.2 billion ), and 24 percent of municipal governmental revenue (\$2.1 billion), making it by far the largest single source of tax or general revenue for general purpose governments in Florida.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the property tax is the primary local revenue source for School Districts. In FY 2000-01, school districts levied \$6.5 billion in property taxes for K-12 education.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the Legislative Committee on Governmental Relations (LCIR), from the LCIR database @ <http://fcn.state.fl.us/lcir/dataAtoZ.html>.

<sup>2</sup> 2003 FLORIDA TAX HANDBOOK, p. 135. The state and federal governments contributed approximately \$9 billion in the same year.

The property tax is important not only because of the revenue it generates, but because it is the only taxing authority not preempted by the Florida Constitution to the state.<sup>3</sup> However, the property tax is not an unlimited source of revenue. The State Constitution caps the millage rates assessed against the value of the property.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Florida Constitution grants property tax relief in the form of valuation differentials,<sup>5</sup> assessment limitations,<sup>6</sup> and exemptions,<sup>7</sup> which includes homestead exemptions.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the courts have ruled that property of the federal government, the state, and the counties is immune from, or not subject to, taxation.<sup>9</sup> The courts have further ruled that this immunity extends to property of school districts<sup>10</sup> and certain special districts.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Article VII, Section 1 of the State Constitution.

<sup>4</sup> See Article VII, Section 9 of the State Constitution. For counties, municipalities, and school districts, the cap is 10 mills. The millage rate for water management districts is capped at 1 mill, except that it is 0.05 mills for the Northwest Florida Water Management District. The millage rate for other special districts is as established by law. A mill is defined as 1/1000 of a dollar, or \$1 per \$1000 of table value.

<sup>5</sup> Article VII, s. 4 of the State Constitution authorizes valuation differentials, which are based on character or use of property, such as agricultural land, land producing high water recharge to Florida's aquifers, and land used exclusively for non-commercial recreational purposes. This section also provides that tangible personal property that is held as inventory may also be assessed at a specified percentage of its value or totally exempted. Additionally, counties and cities are authorized to assess historical property based solely on the basis of its character or use.

<sup>6</sup> Article VII, Section 4(c) of the State Constitution authorizes the "Save Our Homes" property assessment limitation, which limits the increase in assessment of homestead property to the lesser of 3 percent or the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index. Section 4(e) authorizes counties to provide for a reduction in the assessed value of homestead property to the extent of any increase in the assessed value of that property which results from the construction or reconstruction of the property for the purpose of providing living quarters for one or more natural or adoptive grandparents or parents of the owner of the property or of the owner's spouse if at least one of the grandparents or parents for whom the living quarters are provided is 62 years of age or older. This provision is known as the "Granny Flats" assessment limitation. The statutes also provide for differential treatment of specific property, to include pollution control devices (s. 193.621, F.S.) and building renovations for the physically handicapped (s. 193.623, F.S.).

<sup>7</sup> Article VII, s. 3 of the State Constitution, provides authority for the following property tax exemptions:

- All property owned by a municipality and used exclusively by it for municipal or public purposes;
- Portions of property use predominantly for educational, literary, scientific, religious or charitable purposes, as provided in general law;
- Household goods and personal effects, not less than one thousand dollars;
- Property owned by a widow or widower or person who is blind or totally and permanently disabled, not less than five hundred dollars, as provided in general law;
- Property used for community and economic development, by local option and as defined by general law;
- Certain renewable energy source devices and real property on which the device is installed and operated; and
- Historic properties, by local option and as defined by general law.

The statutes also clarify or provide property tax exemptions for certain licensed child care facilities operating in an enterprise zone, properties used to provide affordable housing, educational facilities, charter schools, property owned and used by any labor organizations, community centers, space laboratories, and not-for-profit sewer and water companies.

<sup>8</sup> Article VII, s. 6(a-d) of the State Constitution provides for a \$25,000 homestead exemption. Article VII, s. 6(e) authorizes the Legislature to provide renters who are permanent residents ad valorem tax relief on all ad valorem tax levies. This \$25,000 exemption is implemented in s. 196.1975(9)(a) and 196.1977, F.S., for certain units in non-profit homes for the aged and certain proprietary continuing care facilities. Article VII, s. 6(f) of the Florida Constitution, authorizes the Legislature to allow counties or municipalities, by ordinance, for the purpose of their respective tax levies, to grant an additional homestead tax exemption of up to \$25,000 to resident homeowners who are 65 years of age whose household income, as defined by general law, does not exceed \$20,000, adjusted for inflation.

<sup>9</sup> See *Park-N-Shop, Inc. v. Sparkman*, 99 So. 2d 571 (Fla. 1957); *Orlando Utilities Commission v. Milligan*, 229 So.2d 262 (Fls. Dist.Ct. Appl. 1969); and *Dickinson v. City of Tallahassee*, 325 So.2d 1 (Fla. 1975).

In tax year 2002, the combination of these forms of property tax relief effectively reduce the taxable value of property in this state by 28 percent.<sup>12</sup> For FY 2003-04, it is estimated that the tax revenue loss due to these forms of property tax relief will be \$686 million for valuation differentials, \$2.09 billion for the “Save Our Homes” assessment limitation, and \$10.5 billion for all exemptions.<sup>13</sup>

Any additional reduction in the property tax base will result in a corresponding shift in property tax burden to other property tax owners.<sup>14</sup>

#### *“Save Our Homes” Assessment Limitation*

Article VII, s. 4 of the State Constitution requires that all property be assessed at its just value for ad valorem tax purposes. Just value has been interpreted to mean fair market value.<sup>15</sup> However, section 4 also provides exceptions to this requirement, in the form of valuation differentials and assessment limitations.

The most significant of which is the “Save Our Homes” assessment limitation. The annual increase in homestead property values is limited to 3 percent or the Consumer Price Index percentage, whichever is lower, not to exceed just value. If there is a change in ownership, the property is to be assessed at its just value on the following January 1. The value of changes, additions, reductions or improvements to the homestead property is assessed as provided by general law. Section 193.155, F.S., implements this assessment limitation.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

This joint resolution would amend Art. VII, s. 4, of the Florida Constitution, to provide for “portability” of the “Save Our Homes” assessment limitation. Homestead property purchased within one year after a sale of previously qualified homestead property will be initially assessed at less than just value, as provided by law. The difference between the new homestead property's just value and its assessed value in the first year the homestead is established may not exceed the difference between the previous homestead's just value and its assessed value in the year of sale. In addition, the assessed value of the new homestead must equal or exceed the assessed value of the previous homestead.

Subsequent assessments will be subject to the provisions in Art. VII, s. 4 of the Florida Constitution, which includes the “Save Our Homes” assessment limitation.

The joint resolution provides ballot language.

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<sup>10</sup> *Dickinson v. City of Tallahassee*, 325 So.2d 1 (Fla. 1975).

<sup>11</sup> *Sarasota-Manatee Airport Auth. V. Mikos*, 605 So.2d 132 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Out of \$1,236 billion in just (or market) value, \$347 billion was not taxed. See LCIR database @ <http://fcn.state.fl.us/lcir/dataAto?Z.html>.

<sup>13</sup> 2003 Florida Tax Handbook, p. 139-140.

<sup>14</sup> Generally, local governments respond to this resulting reduction in the tax base in one of three ways: decrease their budgets, replace the lost revenue with other sources of revenue, or increase the millage rate on the remaining taxable property.

<sup>15</sup> *Walter v. Schuler*, 176 So.2d 81.

The joint resolution provides that the amendment shall be submitted to the electors of Florida for approval or rejection at the general election in November 2004.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

##### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

##### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

##### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

##### **D. Other Constitutional Issues:**

Article XI, Section 1 of the State Constitution provides the Legislature the authority to propose amendments to the constitution by joint resolution approved by three-fifths of the membership of each house. The amendment must be placed before the electorate at the next general election held after the proposal has been filed with Secretary of State's office or may be placed at a special election held for that purpose.

#### **V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**

##### **A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

The revenue estimating conference has determined that within five years of adoption of this amendment, property tax revenue would be reduced by \$1.3 billion through FY 2008/09, and the revenue loss would continue to grow thereafter.<sup>16</sup> The revenue impact would not be spread evenly among districts, but would be felt more heavily in fast-growing districts as people move there from other Florida locations.

If local governments raised millage rates to make up for the lost revenue, these millage increases would shift the property tax burden to non-homesteaded property, such as rental and commercial property. Taxes on new Florida residents would also be higher than on residents who have been in the state a longer time, exacerbating existing "Save Our Homes" tax differentials and discouraging in-migration.

However, if this new "portability" authority results in increased purchasing of homes, it will generate additional documentary stamp tax revenue for the state.

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<sup>16</sup> The Revenue Impact Conference estimates that if millage rates remain constant, the annual property tax revenue loss for all property taxing entities (counties, school districts, cities, & special districts) will be \$87 million in FY 2004/5, \$173.9 million in FY 2005/6, \$260.9 million in FY 2006/7, \$347.9 million in FY 2007/8, and 434.8 million in FY 2008/09.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

If approved by the electorate, this provision would allow homestead owners to transfer the benefit accrued under the “Save Our Homes” assessment limitation to their newly purchased homestead property, with certain limitations.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The Division of Elections estimates that the cost to advertise the proposed constitutional amendment twice in a newspaper of general circulation in each county prior to the 2004 general election is approximately \$60,000.

Property Appraisers will be required to re-program their respective systems to accommodate this change.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Amendments:**

None.